



SEEDS OF JUSTICE PROGRAM

Every year all the Mercy schools in Victoria gather to attend the Seeds of Justice conference. Students with an interest in social justice were encouraged to attend this two-day long program in Melbourne. This year, Sela Polata, Lusi Fifita and I represented St Joseph's College Mildura at the conference with Ms Hartshorn and Mr Aston. We left Mildura on Wednesday 1 November at 9:00am and arrived in Melbourne by about 4:15pm. On arrival, we were allocated rooms and by about 7:00pm we went out for a nice dinner in Lygon Street, Carlton.

On Thursday, we woke around 7:30am and went out for breakfast. We had some free time at the Doncaster Shopping Centre and arrived in time to see the other schools check in. The conference began at 11:00am.

By about 12:00pm all schools had arrived and the group completed some activities to get to know each other. The leader of the program outlined the focus of the conference, which was the issue of asylum seekers. A little while later our first guest speaker, Mayra Stark who was from the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASCR), arrived and spoke to us in-depth on the issue of people seeking asylum in Australia and how difficult life is for them. After dinner, we formed small groups and discussed how we could improve awareness of this issue. For our final session for the day we presented our ideas to everyone which included quizzes, prayers and theatre plays.



The next morning everyone woke up early for breakfast and by 9:00am we started our first session. For this session, our guest speaker was Sally Morgan from the St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre (SJFLC). A student who is currently seeking asylum in Australia came with her.

Sally discussed the various reasons people seek asylum and how different it is for people who seek asylum by boat compared to the ones who seek asylum by air travel. She discussed with us how we could assist her organisation and other organisations who were helping people seeking asylum, especially teenagers so they could receive an education in Australia.



For the second half of the session, the student had the opportunity to speak about his experience as an asylum seeker and the difficulties he experienced trying to learn English and get an education. He told us how he had to flee his home country because the government persecuted his family. His father was repeatedly tortured and unfortunately, the student was tortured (at 14 years of age) as well. He was badly hurt and his family were desperate for him to get out of the country, as they feared for his life. He explained in detail how he had to travel in a boat across sea and the various detention centres he had to stay in before he came to SJFLC. Even though he is currently able to sustain a life here, at any moment's notice, the government could send him back

to his home country because he does not have a permanent visa. Unfortunately, we missed the last session about raising awareness of this issue as we had to travel back to Mildura.

The Seeds of Justice Program provides a great opportunity for anyone who is interested in social justice to not only learn about issues such as asylum seekers, but also meet new friends and likeminded people. I would highly recommend this program to anyone who is interested in helping people as this program teaches you to become a more helping, caring and understanding person.

Alfred Joseph, Year 10.